



# *South Atlantic Fishery Management Council*

## *Press Release*

---

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
June 17, 2016

CONTACT: Kim Iverson  
Toll Free 866/SAFMC-10 or 843/571-4366  
kim.iverson@safmc.net

### **Council Addresses Management Options for Red Snapper**

*Options designed to reduce discards and allow harvest considered; public hearings scheduled for cobia, mutton snapper*

Members of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council listened intently as a draft list of management options for red snapper was presented for consideration during their meeting this week in Cocoa Beach, Florida. The options include a comprehensive adaptive management approach that may allow harvest of red snapper as the stock continues to rebuild. The red snapper fishery remains closed for the second year in a row in federal waters after NOAA Fisheries estimated the total number of fish removed in 2015 exceeded the annual catch limit of 114,000 fish by more than double. The majority of the total removals, an estimated 276,729 fish, are attributed to dead discards within the private recreational fishery as fishermen encounter more red snapper while targeting other species. Scientists estimate that approximately 40% of red snapper that are released do not survive.

“No one wants to continue to see the large numbers of red snapper being discarded while this valuable fishery remains closed to harvest,” said Council Chair Dr. Michelle Duval. “Stakeholders have made it clear that managers must consider alternative management options and we agree. The Council must also balance the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act as the stock recovers.” The proposed comprehensive management approach includes options to reduce discards by establishing a federal private recreational snapper grouper fishing season, allowing a limited recreational bag limit for red snapper during the season, use of descending devices and venting tools, changes to size limits, and limiting the number of hooks allowed. The approach also includes requirements for a federal recreational snapper grouper stamp. The Council voted to address options for a limited entry program for the for-hire sector in a separate amendment. There are also recommendations for improving data collection for the fishery that include electronic reporting using logbooks for private recreational fishermen, increased biological sampling, discard monitoring using cooperative research and citizen science projects, tagging programs, and other methods. “Many of the ideas included in this approach are similar to those heard during our port meetings as part of the Visioning process for the snapper grouper fishery,” said Dr. Duval. The Council agreed to move forward with development of a scoping document for further review during their September 2016 meeting.

Council members also had many questions regarding the data used for the latest red snapper stock assessment and the determination by their Scientific and Statistical Committee that the stock remains overfished and undergoing overfishing, as the number of dead discards increases. “The fact that the stock is showing a strong biomass and recovering age structure is encouraging,” said Dr. Luiz Barbieri, senior research scientist with the Florida Marine Research Institute and member of the committee. Red snapper are long-lived, with some fish living up to 50 years, and the stock assessment shows there are still not enough older fish needed for a healthy stock due to overfishing for the past few decades. Dr. Barbieri acknowledged the uncertainty associated with the stock assessment and data available since the red snapper fishery was initially closed in 2010 with subsequent mini recreational seasons in 2012, 2013 and again in 2014. The Council requested the Scientific and Statistical Committee reexamine the assessment and the stock status determination when it meets again in October. The Scientific and Statistical Committee will also review the Council’s proposed changes to stock reference points as noted in the adaptive management approach.

### **Management Changes for Atlantic Cobia and Mutton Snapper Approved for Public Hearings**

The Council approved management actions and alternatives for Atlantic cobia to take out to public hearings scheduled for August 2016. The measures, as outlined in draft Framework Amendment 4 to the Coastal Migratory

*(Continued)*

*(Continued)*

Pelagics Fishery Management Plan would reduce harvest of cobia in federal waters along the Atlantic coast from Georgia to New York. The new measures are designed to help ensure consistent and stable fishing opportunities for all participants in the fishery. The recreational fishery in federal waters will close on June 20, 2016 when the annual catch limit is projected to be met. The early closure for 2016 was required due to the overage of recreational harvest of Atlantic cobia in 2015 and the accountability measure that requires a shortened season the subsequent year. The 2016 recreational closure of the seasonal fishery occurs during the peak fishing season in North Carolina and Virginia. The Council reviewed the numerous written and public comments before choosing alternatives for public hearings. Actions include reducing the recreational bag limit with a preferred alternative to reduce the daily bag limit from 2 per person/day to 1 fish per person/day with a vessel limit of 3 fish/per day, modifying the recreational fishing year with a preferred alternative for the year to begin May 1<sup>st</sup>, modifying the current accountability measure, and changes to the commercial trip limit.

The Council also approved measures for mutton snapper, a popular species found primarily in South Florida and the Florida Keys. Stakeholders have expressed concerns about fishing pressure that occurs each spring as mutton snapper gather to spawn. Snapper Grouper Amendment 41 includes actions to modify the annual catch limit based on the most recent stock assessment for mutton snapper, reduce the current bag limit of 10 fish per person/day with a preferred alternative of 3 fish per person/day year round, establish a commercial trip limit with the preferred alternative of 300 pounds, and modify the minimum size limit, with the Council's preferred alternative to increase the size limit from 16 to 18 inches total length. Public hearings are scheduled for August. Details are available from the Council's website at <http://safmc.net/meetings/public-hearing-and-scoping-meeting-schedule>.

#### **Other Business**

The Council also discussed options for establishing a limited entry program for the federally permitted for-hire sector (Snapper Grouper, Dolphin/Wahoo and Coastal Migratory Pelagic federal permits). The Council approved a control date of June 15, 2016 for the open access charter vessel/headboat permits. The control date is designed to alert fishermen that the Council may use that date for making future management decisions. The Council approved development of an amendment to establish a for-hire limited entry program.

The next Council meeting is scheduled for September 12-16, 2016 at the Marina Inn at Grand Dunes, Myrtle Beach, SC. Final committee reports and other materials from this week's meeting are available from the Council's website at [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net).

Read further details and see images and other links at the June 2016 Council Meeting Round-up Story Map:

<http://arcg.is/2607doc>

The June 2016 meeting report is available at:

[http://safmc.net/sites/default/files/meetings/pdf/Council/2016/06\\_2016/SAFMC\\_MeetingReport\\_June2016v5.pdf](http://safmc.net/sites/default/files/meetings/pdf/Council/2016/06_2016/SAFMC_MeetingReport_June2016v5.pdf)